



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**Health, Education, and Human Services Committee  
discusses the Navajo Birth Cohort Study progress and funding**

**WINDOW ROCK** – On Wednesday, the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee discussed an update report from the Navajo Birth Cohort study, which examines the relationship between uranium exposures, birth outcomes, and child development on the Navajo Nation.

After decades of uranium mining across the Navajo Nation, the cohort study team is currently recruiting Navajo participants, who live near or have been exposed to uranium mines and contaminated areas.

“The cohort study is a part of a Congressionally mandated plan to address the effects of uranium mining,” said UNM director of community environmental health program Dr. Johnnye Lewis.

“Some of our sites have started recruiting participants in Feb., while other sites have kicked-off recruitment earlier this month.”

Dr. Lewis added that the study is funded in three ways. The University of New Mexico, Navajo Area Indian Health Services, and Navajo Nation Division of Health have each received funding from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control for data analysis and community outreach.

The birth cohort study has recently sent blood and urine samples to the CDC, which will be analyzed this week. According to previous samples have returned with traces arsenic, lead, chrome, and manganese.

“We want to work with WIC, the Office of Uranium Workers, the Office of Health Education, and the First Born Program to get people really involved,” said NNDOH CHR program director Mae-Gilene Begay. “We are heavily involved [in] getting out to the chapters and have made presentations at the agency councils.”

Presenters also reported that the hiring of recruiters was delayed due to Navajo Department of Personnel Management’s administrative process.

“I want to let the committee know that the reason we were late applying for the project was because it took over a year to get the project manager and research specialist positions approved by DPM,” said Begay. “It was an uphill battle getting staff hired for this project. Five of the CHR staff had to be assigned to the project.”

Following the presentation, HEHSC vice chair Council Delegate Charles Damon II (Bááháálí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Lichíí, Rock Springs, Tsayatoh) asked for Dr. Lewis to provide with data relative to the Churchrock area.

“In Churchrock we have URI, Inc. and I would like to see the data so that the people have an understanding about what is going on,” said Delegate Damon. “We need to educate the people about theses studies. They do no good if the people never hear them.”

Dr. Lewis explained that the cohort studies do not have any concrete data yet, while offering to share and explain the data from a previous study called the “Diné Project”.

“The ‘Diné Project’ includes water data, and it says there is about 8-10% that is contaminated from uranium and arsenic,” said Dr. Lewis. “There are also some homes that have been built with rocks and materials from the mining sites. After the blastings, workers would take home contaminated materials and use them to build their homes.”

HEHSC chair Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) requested for a written report to share with chapters and constituents.

“We want to be sure to educate them immediately,” said Delegate Hale.

The HEHSC voted to accept the report with a vote of 3-0.

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